Biographies Covered: Pat Mora, Amy Lowell, Margaret Walker, Micere Gitae Mugo, Matsuo Basho, Katy Peake, Chiyo, ee cummings, Robert Burns, Vachel Lindsay, Natasha Trethewey, William Carlos Williams.

- Use biographical information from this study guide, your literature textbook, and your notes to help you prepare for this section of the test. If you’re concerned your notes are incomplete, consult poets.org for additional biographical details.
- Study tip: Focus on “big picture” biographical information, not the nitty gritty 😊 If it wouldn’t make your “fast five facts” list, it’s probably not going to be on my test 😊

Poems Tested: “Legal Alien,” “The Taxi,” “Lineage,” and “Where Are Those Songs?” “Peace” as well as the three other untitled haiku featured on page 498, “who are you, little i,” “I(a,” “A Red, Red Rose,” “An Indian Summer Day on the Prairie,” “Monument,” and “This Is Just to Say.”

Vocabulary: form, rhythm, rhyme, purpose, parallel structure, irony, hyperbole, simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, juxtaposition, cliché, idiom, elegy, paradox, epistle, satire, epigram, ode, sonnet, haiku, quatrain, tone, consonance, couplet, iambic pentameter, hyperbole, pun, free verse.

Natasha Trethewey and “Monument”
Pulitzer Prize winning anthology Native Guard included “Monument,” which was both a tribute to black Union soldiers unrecognized in her hometown of Gulfport, Mississippi, and her mother, who was killed by her second husband a year after they divorced.

Goal of poem and anthology: document forgotten histories.
Whose? Project began with focus on Union soldiers, but then the forgotten history of her mother (& the poems about her) got woven into the original undertaking’s framework

**Elegy**: a song or poem expressing sorrow or lamentation, especially for someone who is dead

**Questions to Consider . . .**
1. Where is the speaker?
2. What prompted the speaker to begin reflecting on her mother’s death, her failures as a daughter? Quote a line from the poem in your answer.
3. What hasn’t the speaker done?
4. What serves as a “monument” to the speaker’s mother’s life?
5. Consider the definition of **displacement**: the redirection of an emotion or impulse from its original object (as an idea or person) to another. What are the two meanings of displacement (literal and metaphoric) in the poem?
6. What is the significance of the title of the anthology, **Native Guard**? You should have two responses, two points of view, for looking at this title.

**Vachel Lindsay and “An Indian Summer Day on the Prairie”**
Lindsay was a kind of troubadour (a class of lyric poets often of knightly rank); he believed poetry was an oral art, so his performances were very vaudevillian (like a theater performance)

**Indian summer**: a meteorological event that occurs in the fall in the Northern Hemisphere when there are consistently above average temperatures, hazy skies, and dry weather – all after the first hard freeze.

**Key Details**
- Use of metaphors throughout (“huntrress young,” “red, red joy,” “an Indian girl,” “a smoldering fire,” “a wounded deer,” “an eagle old”) to compare the sun to youth and age.
- Four stanzas labeled in sequence with a time of day (consider the purpose)
• Four stanzas = four descriptions of the sun (red morning sun, hot mid-morning sun, noon sun shimmering high in the sky, red sun losing strength in the west)

• Patterns (ie second and fourth lines of each stanza always rhyme)

**Robert Burns and “A Red, Red Rose”**
considered the national poet of Scotland; famous for writing “Auld Lang Syne,” the song sung when the clock strikes midnight on New Year’s Day

Forms of poetry popular during Burns’ day:
- *elegy*
- *epistle*: a poem in the form of an elegant letter
- *satire*: a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn
- *epigram*: a concise poem dealing pointedly and often satirically with a single thought or event and often ending with an ingenious turn of thought; a terse, sage, or witty and often paradoxical saying (“Time is money.”

Burns wrote all of these, but eventually favored . . . *lyric poems*: short poems of song like quality; they concentrate on the thoughts and feelings of the poet (examples are *odes* and *sonnets*).

Ultimately Burns often wrote from a woman’s point of view, wrote in Scottish dialect, and composed primarily lyric poems because . . . he knew this was the way to be the most profitable. 😊

*ode*: lyric poem in the form of an address to a particular subject, often elevated in style or manner and written in varied or irregular meter

*sonnet*:
• fourteen lines
• three quatrains and a couplet
• ABABCCDDEFEFGG
• iambic pentameter (five pairs of one stressed and one unstressed syllable)
• etymology: *sonneto*, Italian for “little sound” or “little song”

“When a poem has a regular **rhythm**, the predictable pattern of syllables is called **meter**.” This is the case with “A Red, Red Rose.”

Peruse the poem and list the series of **similes** and the examples of **hyperbole** you find.

**ee cummings, “who are you, little i,” and “l(a”**

explored “traditional” poetry while studying at Harvard, but cummings’ work ultimately came to be known as anything but (traditional)

was a POW during WWI, which was the inspiration for the book *The Enormous Room*

**form**: external pattern of a poem (how lines and stanzas are organized); form dictates rhythm, meter, and rhyme

**Questions to Consider about “who are you, little i” . . .**

1. How does the form of the poem relate to what it is about?
2. What is the significance of the parenthesis?
3. What is the transition of day to night a metaphor for?
4. Where’s the pun? Explain it.
5. Who is the speaker, and what is he like? What was he like in the past? What was he like in the present?
6. Based on what’s included in the second parenthesis, what can you infer?
7. How does the form of the poem break it into halves? For what purpose is this done?
8. What is the significance of the lack of question mark after the word “sunset”? 
9. What is the significance of not capitalizing the personal pronoun “I”?
Questions to Consider about “l(a” . . .

1. What is the effect of the one “l” on a line by itself?
2. What is the effect of the pairing of one short letter and one tall letter in each line of the second stanza?
3. If the “l” and “a” in the title each stand for a noun related to the poem, which two words would you suggest and why? 😊
4. Where are three places in the poem the numeral one is emphasized? To what end?

HAIKU

- 5-7-5 syllable pattern in the three lines
- 17 syllables total
- Japanese
- focus: nature
- In English, first or second line generally ends with dash, colon, or ellipsis
- speaker does not usually appear in a haiku as “I”

Matsuo Basho
1644-1694
gave up life as a civil servant to open a writing school; this facilitated time for his own writing, travel, and meditation

Chiyo
1703-1775
female
poetry emphasized “oneness with nature”

Katy Peake
1917-1995
American
also photographer

Consider: How is a haiku like a photograph?

Micere Githae Mugo and “Where Are Those Songs?”
• Kenyan; first black Kenyan to attend a previously all-white girls’ school. Her place in this school was fought for by political activists.
• Now lives in the US; was forced to leave her home country because of her political beliefs

“Where Are These Songs?” delineates what’s remembered and what’s been forgotten

rhythm: pattern of beats caused by stressed and unstressed syllables
• Find a place in the poem where parallel construction is used to create rhythm.
• Look at lines 20-24, how the clipped rhythms mirror what was described in line 19 (women “beat[ing] out rhythms”).
• Study lines 35-38.
• In lines 68-70, there is one word per line, like a drumbeat, like the footsteps of someone approaching his destination. The speaker is coming to the end of the poem, a solution for forgotten songs/memories/traditions is about to be offered.
• What effect does line length have on rhythm? You can have short, choppy lines or long, flowing ones. When would you use each?

Questions/ Items to Consider . . .
1. Why was repetition featured prominently in this piece?
2. What does the speaker say someone should do if old songs/traditions have been lost?
3. Why are traditions important?
4. Explain “swallowed in parts by choking smoke.”

Margaret Walker and “Lineage”
• After her brother shot her with a BB gun at 8, Walker became “self-conscious and withdrawn” and retreated into the world of reading and writing.
• Attended Spellman College and then Sarah Lawrence. In between attendance at these two schools, Walker spent time in Africa.
• Influenced by Zora Neale Hurston (Their Eyes Were Watching God, sometimes underappreciated author of the Harlem Renaissance)
• Most famous for The Color Purple, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award

“Lineage”
1. What is the tone of the poem?
2. Find examples of parallel construction and alliteration. Decide what each example’s impact &/or purpose was in the poem.
3. Consider the rhythm of the line “smelling of soap and onions and wet clay.” Why do you think the poet decided to use two “and”s to combine these ideas into one line?

Amy Lowell and “The Taxi”
• Imagist poet; imagists write in free verse and according to founder Ezra Pound, strive for “clarity of expression through the use of precise visual images.” The patterns and rhythms of common speech are evident in imagist poetry.
• Pulitzer Prize winner

“The Taxi”
1. Find a metaphor.
2. Make note of all sensory details utilized to paint the picture of this one moment of separation.

Pulitzer Prize Winners We’ve Studied This Year
1. Amy Lowell
2. Natasha Trethewey
3. Rita Dove
4. William Carlos Williams
5. Robert Frost (4)

Pat Mora and “Legal Alien”
leading figure in contemporary poetry in US Mexican-American
known for including Spanish words and phrases in her poems
“Legal Alien”
Look at parallel construction. What is the purpose of “able to slip...,” “able to sit...,” “able to order...”? What is the poet emphasizing?

Look at the use of the term “perhaps” twice in quick succession followed by “definitely different.” What does the poet accomplish with this repetition and alliteration?

Explain the irony of the line “viewed by Mexicans as alien.”

Examine lines 16-22 and Mora’s use of similes explaining how the speaker hides negative emotions, feelings of being prejudged by both sides.

What is the significance of the prefix “bi-” with the use of “bi-lingual,” “bi-cultural,” and “bi-laterally”? What is the significance of the hyphen? Discuss the way the poem comes “full circle” with the use of these words, how these words “bookend” the poem itself.

Williams Carlos Williams and “This Is Just to Say”
Williams was also a practicing physician his entire life. Imagist poet whose subject matter was the everyday

“This Is Just to Say”
• made up of three quatrains
• tone = sincere and repentant or mocking?
• consonance (Th, F, S) creates rhythm
• Is the apology specifically about plums; or more generally about knowing something’s wrong, doing it anyway, and then taunting the person you wronged with a half-hearted apology? Or is the poem both of these things?
• Who’s the speaker? Who’s the recipient of the note? What was the “crime”? Was the writer of the note forgiven?